

Message Text

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TO USMISSION SINAI PRIORITY
INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY ALGIERS PRIORITY
USINT BAGHDAD PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY DOHA PRIORITY
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY MANAMA PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY
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TAGS: EG, IS, PINR

SUBJECT: INTSUM 514 - MARCH 6, 1978

LONDON FOR KINSOLVING
PARIS FOR NICHOLAS MURPHY
OTHER ADDRESSEES FOR CHIEFS OF MISSION

1. LEBANON. IN WHAT MAY BE THE WORST OUTBREAK OF SECTARIAN FIGHTING SINCE THE CIVIL WAR ENDED IN NOVEMBER 1976, CHRISTIAN AND PALESTINIAN GUNMEN CLASHED ALONG THE TRADITIONAL CONFRONTATION LINE IN BEIRUT. THE ADF INTERVENED STOPPING THE FIRING, SNIPING REPORTEDLY LATER RESUMED.

2. ELSEWHERE IN SOUTHERN LEBANON, SHELLING CONTINUED BETWEEN RIGHTIST LEBANESE AND PALESTINIAN FORCES. SHIITE RESIDENTS OF A VILLAGE WHICH WAS OVERRUN BY PALESTINIANS AT THE END OF LAST WEEK, CLAIM THAT SYRIAN-BACKED SAIQA FORCES NOW CONTROL THEIR VILLAGE. SCORES OF VILLAGERS ARE REPORTEDLY ALONG THE ISRAELI BORDER AND WILL NOT RETURN TO THEIR HOME UNTIL SAIQA WITHDRAWS.

3. EMBASSY DAMASCUS REPORTS, MEANWHILE, THAT DESPITE DISINFORMATION BEING CIRCULATED BY THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT, SENIOR INTELLIGENCE SOURCES INDICATE THAT 170 SYRIAN SOLDIERS, INCLUDING THREE COLONELS, WERE KILLED IN THE THREE DAYS OF FIGHTING IN LEBANON IN FEBRUARY. CURRENTLY THE SYRIAN PUBLIC ACCEPTS DAMASCUS' ROLE IN LEBANON. AN ESCALATION IN CASUALTIES, HOWEVER, COULD UPSET THIS CONSENSUS. IN ADDITION A FLOW OF SYRIAN COFFINS TO SUNNI AREAS COULD EASILY SPARK ANTI-REGIME DEMONSTRATIONS OR
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VIOLENCE, ACCORDING TO EMBASSY DAMASCUS. (CONFIDENTIAL)

4. ISRAEL. THE STAR OF DEFENSE MINISTER WEIZMAN, NOW ON A US VISIT, HAS BEEN RISING WITHIN ISRAEL AND THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT. HIS SCHEDULED SEPARATE TALKS WITH US LEADERS SEEM TO HAVE EVOLVED, IN ISRAELI EYES, INTO SOMEWHAT OF A BELLWETHER OF HIS POLITICAL ABILITIES IN THE DIPLOMATIC ARENA AND OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH HIS INFLUENCE HAS GROWN WITHIN THE CABINET.

5. THE RESULTS OF WEIZMAN'S VISIT WILL LIKELY BE JUDGED BY THE ISRAELIS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE RECENT INFORMATION TOUR IN THE US BY KNESSET FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND SECURITY COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN MOSHE ARENS, WHICH WAS CONSIDERED BY MOST ISRAELIS TO HAVE BEEN A FAILURE, AND DAYAN'S PERCEIVED LACKLUSTER PERFORMANCE DURING HIS RECENT WASHINGTON DISCUSSIONS. AS EMBASSY TEL AVIV HAS OBSERVED, WEIZMAN HAS GRADUALLY ASSUMED THE MANTLE OF LEADERSHIP OF THE EMERGING MODERATE, PRAGMATIC WING OF THE CABINET. THIS "WING" COUNTS AMONG ITS PARTISANS THE DMC MINISTERS. LIBERAL MINISTERS EHRLICH AND PATT HAVE IN THE PAST INDICATED SUPPORT FOR WEIZMAN, ALTHOUGH EHRLICH IN HIS OWN RIGHT ENTERTAINS NOTIONS OF SUCCEEDING BEGIN, SHOULD THE LATTER LEAVE THE PREMIERSHIP.

6. WEIZMAN, HOWEVER, DOES NOT APPEAR TO HAVE ACTIVELY SOUGHT OR PRE-PLANNED HIS EMERGENCE AS A "MODERATE" IN A

HAWKISH CABINET. RATHER, THIS SEEMS TO HAVE ENSUED FROM THE SLOWDOWN IN THE PACE OF PEACE NEGOTIATIONS AND THE RESULTANT CLARITY IN ISSUES SEPARATING THE TWO SIDES. HIS PRAGMATIC APPROACH TO THE TALKS, CONTRASTED TO THE IDEOLOGICAL COMMITMENTS AND PRONOUNCEMENTS OF BEGIN AND CABINET HARDLINERS, HAS THRUST UPON HIM THE IMAGE OF A MODERATE.

7. WEIZMAN IS NOT BELIEVED TO BE VERY COMFORTABLE WITH
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HIS NEW ROLE. THE "DOVE" LABEL, EMBASSY TEL AVIV NOTED, IS AN EMBARRASSMENT TO HIM. IT HAS SET HIM APART FROM BEGIN IN THE PUBLIC'S MIND; HURT HIM WITH HIS HERUT CONSTITUENCY, WHOSE HARDLINE IDEOLOGY MAKES IT SHY AWAY FROM THE PERCEIVED "MODERATE" WEIZMAN; AND PUT HIM IN THE POSITION, FOR THE SAKE OF THE REALISTIC REQUIREMENTS OF THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS, OF SEEMINGLY OPPOSING LONG-HELD ISRAELI BELIEFS SUCH AS THE RIGHT TO SETTLE FREELY IN THE OCCUPIED AREAS. MOREOVER, WEIZMAN IS TOO OFTEN REFERRED TO AS "THE EGYPTIAN IN THE CABINET" FOR HIS OWN POLITICAL GOOD, THE EMBASSY REMARKED.

8. WE BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT OVEREMPHASIS ON HIS APPARENT MODERATION SHOULD BE AVOIDED. HIS VIEWS HAVE IN FACT BEEN TEMPERED, PARTICULARLY WHEN SEEN AGAINST HIS EARLIER REPUTATION OF BEING MORE HAWKISH AND DOGMATIC THAN EVEN BEGIN. THIS SEEMS TO BE LARGELY A RESULT OF BEING EXPOSED TO THE REALITIES OF NEGOTIATIONS AND OF THE FAVORABLE IMPRESSIONS HE HAS GAINED OF SADAT AND THE EGYPTIANS. HIS MODERATE STANCE, HOWEVER, IS RELATIVE AND STANDS OUT ONLY AMONG THE HARDLINERS OF HIS OWN PARTY AND THE NRP.

9. ON THE ONE HAND, HE SEEMS TO BELIEVE THAT EGYPT TRULY WANTS PEACE. AS A RESULT, WEIZMAN IS PREPARED TO ABANDON THE SINAI SETTLEMENTS, OVER A REASONABLE TRANSITION PERIOD, IF THIS WERE NECESSARY FOR ACHIEVING PEACE. ON THE OTHER HAND, HIS VIEWS REGARDING THE WEST BANK APPEAR TO AGREE WITH BEGIN, AND IN THIS HE COMES OFF AS EVEN LESS FLEXIBLE THAN DAYAN. HE BELIEVES STRONGLY IN THE BASIC RIGHT OF JEWS TO SETTLE IN THE WEST BANK, AND SUPPORTS THE CONCEPT OF BEGIN'S SELF-RULE PLAN, ALTHOUGH HE AGREES THAT A LARGER JORDANIAN DIMENSION WOULD LIKELY HAVE TO BE FACTORED IN.
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10. FRUSTRATED BY THE PACE OF CURRENT TALKS, WEIZMAN HAS HINTED AT MOVING AWAY FROM BEGIN OR QUITTING THE GOVERNMENT. MORE LIKELY, IN THE EMBASSY'S VIEW, HE WILL BIDE HIS TIME FOR THE PRESENT IN THE BELIEF THAT THE TIDE IS

MOVING IN HIS FAVOR AND THAT THE PREMIERSHIP WILL DEVOLVE ON HIM WHEN BEGIN LEAVES OR FALTERS. HE WILL NOT MOVE TO CHALLENGE BEGIN OPENLY. IN THE MEANTIME, HE IS QUIETLY GATHERING POLITICAL SUPPORT FOR THE POSSIBLE DAY WHEN HE MAY ASSUME THE PREMIERSHIP. (CONFIDENTIAL)

11. EGYPT. EGYPT WILL TRY IN ABSENTIA THE TWO PALESTINIANS BEING HELD BY CYPRUS FOR KILLING EGYPTIAN JOURNALIST SIBAI, ACCORDING TO EGYPTIAN PRESS REPORTS. CYPRUS' ATTORNEY GENERAL, MEANWHILE, HAS APPLIED TO THE SUPREME COURT TO BEGIN TRYING THE PALESTINIANS IN CYPRUS NO LATER THAN MARCH 14.

12. PRESIDENT SADAT CONTINUES TO PRESS CYPRUS TO EXTRADITE THE MEN TO EGYPT, ALTHOUGH HIS RECENT PUBLIC ATTACKS HAVE FOCUSED ON THE CYPRIOT GOVERNMENT RATHER THAN ON PRESIDENT KYPRIANOU PERSONALLY. CYPRIOT LEADERS HAVE BEEN NON-COMMITTAL ABOUT THE ULTIMATE FATE OF THE TERRORISTS. THEY SEEM TO RECOGNIZE, HOWEVER, THAT CYPRUS MUST DEAL HARSHLY WITH THE TWO MEN, PROBABLY BY EXECUTING THEM OR EXTRADITING THEM TO EGYPT AFTER THE TRIAL, IF CYPRUS IS TO REGAIN EGYPTIAN FRIENDSHIP AND SUPPORT IN ITS DISPUTE WITH TURKEY.

13. SADAT'S GOVERNMENT IS UNDER ATTACK AT HOME FOR ITS HANDLING OF THE SIBAI ASSASSINATION AND THE BOTCHED RESCUE ATTEMPT. EGYPTIAN LEFTISTS AND OTHERS CITE THE AFFAIR AS AN EXAMPLE OF THE GOVERNMENT'S INCOMPETENCE.

14. AN EASTERN EUROPEAN DIPLOMAT TOLD EMBASSY CAIRO THAT CONTINUED TRADE AND SHIPMENTS OF COKING COAL FROM THE CONFIDENTIAL

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USSR TO EGYPT WILL BE DEPENDENT UPON CAIRO'S CONTINUING TO HONOR THE SOVIET MILITARY DEBT. THE SOVIETS REPORTEDLY HAVE SAID THAT EGYPT HAS NEVER STOPPED SERVICING THIS OBLIGATION BUT THAT SADAT'S SEPTEMBER 1977 ANNOUNCEMENT OF AN UNILATERAL TEN-YEAR DEBT MORATORIUM HAS THEM WORRIED. EMBASSY CAIRO COMMENTS THAT IF THIS INFORMATION IS CORRECT IT IS STARTLING BECAUSE THERE HAS BEEN NO OTHER INDICATION THAT EGYPT HAS BEEN SERVICING ITS SOVIET DEBT OVER THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS. (CONFIDENTIAL)

15. IRAQ. THE INFLEXIBLE APPROACH TO THE PEACE PROCESS HAS WORKED BOTH TO BAGHDAD'S ADVANTAGE AND DISADVANTAGE. WHILE BAGHDAD'S TRACK RECORD OF OPPOSITION TO PEACE NEGOTIATIONS BASED UPON RESOLUTION 242 SERVED MINIMAL IRAQI INTERESTS, THIS POLICY ALSO CONSTRAINED THE IRAQIS FROM TAKING ADVANTAGE OF OPPORTUNITIES CREATED BY THE DISARRAY IN ARAB RANKS. CONSEQUENTLY, IRAQ REMAINS ISOLATED IN THE ARAB WORLD AND THUS UNABLE TO SERIOUSLY AFFECT CURRENT MIDEAST PEACE TALKS.

16. THE IRAQIS INITIALLY SEEMED CONVINCED THAT THEIR HARDLINE POLICY TOWARD ISRAEL HAD BEEN VINDICATED BY ARAB HOSTILITY TO SADAT'S VISIT TO JERUSALEM. THEY DERIVED SOME COMFORT FROM THE RESULTING IMBALANCE IN SYRIA'S NEGOTIATING POSTURE AND APPARENTLY BELIEVED THAT LEADERSHIP OF THE ANTI-SADAT FORCES WOULD NATURALLY GRAVITATE TO BAGHDAD. IN THE ENSUING COMPETITION FOR ARAB INFLUENCE, HOWEVER, SYRIAN TACTICAL FLEXIBILITY PROVED MORE ATTRACTIVE TO EGYPT'S OPPONENTS THAN DID IRAQ'S DOGMATIC EFFORTS TO CLOSE ALL NEGOTIATION DOORS.

17. BAGHDAD'S INABILITY TO TURN ITS OPPORTUNITIES INTO SOLID POLITICAL ACHIEVEMENTS HAS REINFORCED ARAB PER-
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CEPTIONS OF IRAQI DIPLOMATIC INEPTNESS. ACCORDING TO OUR INTERESTS SECTION IN BAGHDAD, IRAQI ANTICS AT THE VARIOUS ARAB CONFERENCES BURNISH IRAQ'S REPUTATION AS THE SORE-HEAD OF THE ARAB WORLD. SINCE SADAT'S VISIT TO ISRAEL, IRAQI REPRESENTATIVES HAVE:

(A) WALKED OUT OF THE TRIPOLI STEADFASTNESS SUMMIT;

(B) SPURNED ATTENDANCE AT THE FOLLOW-UP ALGIERS SUMMIT;

(C) STALKED OUT OF THE ARAB LABOR CONFERENCE IN KUWAIT AFTER DELEGATES REFUSED TO SELECT BAGHDAD AS THE NEW ARAB LABOR HEADQUARTERS AND CHOSE DAMASCUS INSTEAD; AND

(D) STAGED A WALKOUT AT THE TRIPOLI ARAB WOMEN'S CONFERENCE.

18. ALSO ACCORDING TO OUR INTERESTS SECTION, THE IRAQIS ARE DISPLAYING RESENTMENT AT THE RECENT EVIDENT IMPROVEMENT IN SOVIET RELATIONS WITH SYRIA. ACCUSTOMED TO DESCRIBING THE SOVIET UNION AS THEIR "STRATEGIC ALLY," IRAQI LEADERS ARE UNHAPPY THAT THE SYRIAN MEDIA HAVE APPROPRIATED THE TERM TO DESCRIBE DAMASCUS-MOSCOW TIES. AS A RESULT, THE IRAQIS HAVE LATELY SIGNALLED TO THE SOVIETS THEIR DISPLEASURE WITH THE NEW LEVEL OF COZINESS BETWEEN DAMASCUS AND MOSCOW.

19. IRONICALLY, WHILE THE IRAQIS HAVE LEFT THE IMPRESSION THAT IDEOLOGICAL DETERMINANTS PROHIBIT A RAPPROCHEMENT WITH SYRIA, THEY TOLERATE SOME MEASURE OF PRAGMATISM IN THEIR ONGOING TIES WITH EGYPT. FOR EXAMPLE, IN MID-FEBRUARY THE EGYPTIAN PRESS PUBLICIZED AN EGYPTIAN-IRAQI TRADE DEAL AND PREDICTED THAT THE VOLUME OF BILATERAL TRADE WILL RISE IN 1978. OUR INTERESTS SECTION NOTED THAT THE 1958 PROTOCOL GOVERNING COMMERCIAL RELA-

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TIONS BETWEEN IRAQ AND EGYPT IS STILL BEING IMPLEMENTED. MOREOVER, A SIZABLE EGYPTIAN COMMUNITY REMAINS IN IRAQ, AND THE REGIME HAS REPORTEDLY ISSUED A DIRECTIVE TO TREAT EGYPTIANS WELL.

20. THUS, WHILE THE IRAQI REGIME HAS EASILY RETAINED ITS BALANCE SINCE THE SADAT INITIATIVE, IT HAS FAILED TO PERSUADE OTHER ARAB STATES TO ADOPT IRAQI SUGGESTIONS IN OPPOSING SADAT. (CONFIDENTIAL)

21. SYRIA. EMBASSY DAMASCUS REPORTS THAT ANOTHER ALAWITE PROFESSOR HAS BEEN SHOT IN ALEPPO. HE IS THE FOURTH ACADEMIC TO BE SHOT IN THE LAST YEAR. ELSEWHERE, A MUSLIM CROWD IN HAWA REPORTEDLY MARCHED ON THE CHRISTIAN QUARTER FEBRUARY 19 AND DEMOLISHED A CHRISTIAN-OWNED CAFE. SECURITY FORCES CONTAINED THE DEMONSTRATION AND ARRESTED ELEVEN. THERE HAS ALSO BEEN AN INCREASE IN BOMBING INCIDENTS. OUR EMBASSY COMMENTS THAT THESE INCIDENTS SUGGEST THAT IRAQ HAS AGAIN CHOSEN TO STIMULATE TROUBLE. (CONFIDENTIAL) VANCE

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